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ABSTRACT

It is impossible to divorce oneself from geography. Students at an early age need to see how much a part of their lives geography is. This document offers teachers, students, and parents an exciting opportunity to discover the geography in themselves. The program explores the many ways geography affects people starting right from birth. Differences between class members can be shared, mapped, and appreciated. Multicultural education becomes a real part of the social studies curriculum in a meaningful way as children learn to appreciate similarities and differences in each other. Parents become active participants in their children's geographic education. The approach is fun for students, parents, and teachers, and integrates well with creative writing and literature based reading. (Author/SG)

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF ME

ABSTRACT: It is impossible to divorce oneself from geography. Students, at an early age, need to see how much a part of their lives geography is. The "Geography of Me" offers teachers, students, and parents an exciting opportunity to discover the geography in themselves. The program explores the many ways geography affects us starting right from birth. Differences between class members can be shared, mapped, and appreciated. Multi-cultural education becomes a real part of the social studies curriculum in a meaningful way as children learn to appreciate differences and similarities in each other. Parents become active participants in their children's geographic education. The "Geography of Me" is fun for students, parents, and teachers. It integrates well with creative writing and literature based reading.

KEY WORDS: location, place, multi-cultural, ancestor, vocabulary, language, vacation, residence, integrated curriculum, inter-active homework

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THE GEOGRAPHY OF ME INTRODUCTION: In most primary classrooms, some time during the school year is spent on part of the curriculum usually known as "All About Me" or something similar. The purpose of this unit is to increase the student's self esteem. As part of the unit, my students create a wall chart called "The Geography of Me." It, too, increases student self esteem. It goes further than the usual "All About Me" books students make. Students learn about where they come from and where they would like to go.

I usually introduce this activity during American Education Week. Parents visit their children in the classroom. I like having parents on hand so that the parent can monitor the child's progress and see how well the student attends to task. But, I like parents there for better reason: the parents are a primary source for the data children need to complete their "Geography of Me" charts. Parents supply the missing information which children need. You can complete this activity without parents in school. The teacher can send the fact sheet home as an inter-active homework assignment. The student completes the fact sheet at home with the help of a parent. Students use the data sheet to complete their chart on .story paper in their own handwriting. The sentence starters for the "Geography of Me" activity is included at the end of the article.

When completed the charts are hung in a conspicuous place in school. One year they were hung above the lockers outside of our room. They were too high for the children to

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read and for visitors to appreciate. Another year, the charts hung in the cafeteria where all the students in the school could see and read them. However, feel that the best place to hang the charts is directly outside of the office. Parents and other people in the community as well as other children, teachers, and administrators enjoy seeing and reading the "Geography of Me" charts. Everyone learns from reading the biographical/ geographical information the children have included on their charts.

The "Geography of Me" charts reinforce the increasing importance of geography as part of the curriculum. During American Education Week this is important because of the increased adult traffic through the building. This year, American Education Week and Geography Awareness Week were during the same week. We celebrated geography awareness week by making and displaying our "Geography of Me" charts.

Above all, "The Geography of Me" is fun for children and if your parents visit and help, it will be fun for them, too. Letting parents know you are teaching geography is an important public relations bonus for you and your school.

There is no grade level cut off for this activity. Since I teach first grade, I do this activity as part of first grade social studies. "The Geography of Me" works with any grade level. Additional sentence starters can be added to make the activity more challenging, especially if your

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students need more of a challenge. Older students don't really need mom or dad to help. If you have taught the students to use the atlas's index, the students can locate the places in the "Geography of Me" charts themselves. This reinforces skill building and self-reliance. As you will read later on, there are extension activities to accompany "The Geography of Me". Some teachers feel more comfortable putting the information into a booklet form. Booklets are fun to make nd in some ways last longer. Parents save the booklets as mementos of their child's first grade experiences. The charts, even when rolled up, become easily torn and wrinkled.

Materials should be at hand when parents arrive. Extra seating is necessary for parents. Try to arrange the furniture so that parents and children have a place to work without distracting others. The teacher becomes a real facilitator of learning: assisting when necessary and answering questions. Before beginning work remember these tips: 1. pass-out materials before anyone actually starts working, 2. generally explain the concept to parents, 3. show parents where extra materials and resources are located, and 4. read your own "Geography of Me" chart to parents and students alike.

Children (and parents) enjoy learning more about the teacher which is one reason to read your own chart. This

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makes the teacher seem like a real person. Modeling your own "Geography of Me" chart has the added bonus of showing parents what your expectations are and it lets them see what a finished product looks like. Seeing the finished product lessens the amount of questions parents ask. As a facilitator, the teacher will be busy trouble-shooting other situations.

Have some extension activities ready for parents and children who finish early. Show parents where to hang the finished charts before beginning any extension activities. The activities can range from word games to maps to color. Word games like acrostics, word puzzles, word searches, and puzzle boxes are fun for parents and children to complete together. Of course, children should already know how to complete these puzzles or else the activity becomes frustrating for both child and parent. Extension activities reinforce geography concepts. Geography puzzles also reinforce the reading vocabulary used in their "Geography of Me" charts.

"The Geography of Me" becomes an integrated writing/reading/social studies project. Since the vocabulary is controlled and the parents are helping the children with the words, children learn to read the words used so often in a specific context.

There are few extra costs to the teacher when designing

the "Geography of Me" project. Materials are usually at hand: 12x18 student story paper, a map of the United States, a map of the world, markers, and paste. Taking photographs of the students to paste on their charts is a personal touch, but not necessary. Demonstrating first how to assemble the papers and maps into a finished product helps parents. One thing more is needed: name books. I take-out several name books from the library.

The name books have titles like "6000 names for Baby". There are many on the market. Not every child's name is in the books, however. Having mom or dad there to help the child work on the project can help here too. Many parents who give their children ethnic names will know both the geographic origin of the name and what the name means in a specific language.

By using the "Geography of Me" we can celebrate the ethnic diversity of our student population. Real multi-cultural awareness starts with an appreciation of each other as individuals. Names are very individualistic. Children enjoy learning what their names and those of their friends mean. They like learning where their name came from. It is amazing to find out that names really mean something tangible.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Your "Geography of Me" stories can also be duplicated or

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photocopied to make interesting class books with biographical data. Children will each receive a copy. They can practice reading each other's stories. You can also use the photocopied biographical books as part of future directed reading lessons.

Use can use the biographical data generated by the "Geography of Me" books in other ways. Using large maps of the world you can locate each child's birth place on the map with a star and a small label with each child's name. I use three maps for this activity: one map locating birth places of children born in Maryland, another map of the United States for children born in other states, and a third map of the world for children born in other countries. This activity demonstrates the ethnic diversity of our student population. By removing the labels after a few days. The maps can be reused for other similar geographical activities. Generating lists such as "birth places" with each child's name and place of birth is one way to keep a record of this data and still use the same maps for other activities.

As a related math activity, you can make a pictograph showing "Maryland Births", "U.S. Births", and "Births in Other Counties". If you teach primary grades, questions about more than, less than, greater than, etc. are applicable questions for the graphing activity. In the intermediate grades, questions about how much more, etc. are applicable.

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Older students can use data generated in lists to make line graphs, bar graphs, and pie graphs. Remember, if data can be presented on maps, it can be counted, sorted, tallied, and graphed. In this way geography becomes integrated with mathematics.

We can generated lists and do whole class mapping for other questions on the "Geography of Me" charts. Make a class map of "Vacation Areas", "Where I Would Live to Visit", and "Where I Would Like to Live." Since children seem interested in the origin of their names, mapping and graphing countries of origins of names is of interest, too. Do many of your children have Biblical names?

You can continue the build upon the student interest in geography by drawing upon the interest children have with other things. Have a sharing day. The children bring in their favorite toys to share and talk about. Fortunately, many toys have the country of origin stamped on them. If you are learning about mammals in science, let the children bring in a zoo of stuffed animals. The country of origin of each animal is usually found on a tag. If you are reading the story "Goldilocks and the Three Bears", the children can bring stuffed bears to school. The countries named on the tags can be graphed and mapped. By extension you can begin discussing not only the "where" of a toy's origin, but also the "why". Learning that countries are our trading partners

is an important step in learning the complex nature of international trade and reasons why this country is a trading partner with another nation.

When children know what their name means in another language, they can use this information to make pictures. In heraldry, boys names are put on shields and girls names are put on lozenges (diamond shapes.) The child illustrates his name on as shield. Thus, Colin would draw a "boy from the hills" on his shield. Gillian would draw a picture of a "girl in the meadow" on her lozenge. This heraldic symbols can be displayed in the hall. This is an excellent way to introduce word meanings and word play to children. You can also use the shields/lozenges to keep track of good workers by stamping each child's work in order to keep track of progress. CONCLUSION: The geography of me provides a fun way of introducing children to the need for understanding geography. Places on maps become real. When working with children it is necessary to go from the concrete to the abstract. Places have personal significance for children. They are concrete. The places as represented on maps become abstract. "The Geography of Me" helps children move from the concrete to the abstract so that geographic understanding becomes easier to remember and use.

This is a copy of the fact sheet children and parents fill-in. Feel free to change, adapt, or add to as

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necessary.Each child will write the sentence starter on his/her story paper. You, the parent, can help with the answer to the fill-in-the-blank sentence starter. Write your answer out so your child sees what the whole word looks like. Then, you and your child can locate each place on a map of the world or the U.S.

1. I live in _____.

2. I was born in _____.

3. Last summer I went to visit _____.

OR Last year I went on vacation to _____.

4. If I could visit any place in the world it would be_____.

5. If I could live any place in the whole world it would be _____.

6. My last name is _____.

7. My ancestors came from _____.

8. My first name is _____.

9. It is a word from the language in _____.

10. My name means _____.

Rewrite the sentence starters on story paper.

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